

Written Response to Submissions on Petition number PE1653 on Active Travel Infrastructure

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As the petitioner, I greatly appreciate the time taken by the Petitions Committee to review this petition and listen to the case I put forward with Dave du Feu and David French in Parliament. I also appreciate the time and consideration that the WWF, Sustrans and the Scottish Government put into responding to the petition. In my response, I would like to reiterate key points made in the submissions and look at possible ways to put into practice the good policies of the Scottish Government on active travel so that bicycle commuter routes from regional areas into city centres can be better supported.

Scottish Transport is at a key juncture with the National Transport Strategy review currently being undertaken. This is an excellent opportunity to assess policy, along with implementation and look for success, failures and evidence and if evidence supports policy, how to implement this policy.

Regarding the Sheriffhall, there was an initial consultation, then a Stage 2 assessment: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/drmb-stage-2-assessment-report-a720-sheriffhall-roundabout/> which assessed five sub-criteria - environment, safety, economy, accessibility and integration - to determine which of three potential roundabout options should be chosen. Option B was then chosen, unfortunately Option B, as it stood, was the worst option for cyclists.

I am very pleased that AECOM and Transport Scotland subsequently took concerns about Non Motorised User (NMU) access on the roundabout seriously and arranged a Wider Stakeholder Workshop where they presented 9 very well thought out NMU options for consideration. After having attended this meeting I feel confident that a good, safe, segregated route will be provided for those not travelling in vehicles. Whilst I am thrilled about this outcome, I do wonder what the NMU provision would have been like had there not been such vociferous objections to Option B, including the intervention of the Petitions Committee. To ensure that the Scottish Government's sustainable travel hierarchy, which promotes walking and cycling prior to other forms of movement, is actually implemented when assessing new projects, it is vital that the Transport Review looks at how these new projects are appraised. This was detailed in section 4 of Sustrans' response, along with a request for transport appraisal to become more transparent.

It is apparent that engaging with all key stakeholders throughout the entire planning and development process - not just at the beginning and end of the planning, with a black box stage in the middle where the actual decisions are made - can have very positive outcomes. This was detailed in the submission from the Scottish Government where they mentioned the Dualling of the A9 and A96. It is clear that by setting up the NMU Forums to provide updates and feedback the project has run relatively smoothly and will hopefully result in shared use facilities that all parties are happy with.

The Scottish Government is to be commended on the many documents and plans published to support active travel and cycling, these are detailed in their petition response. However, these are guides and there is no legal requirement to include active travel in new major infrastructure projects, whether by Transport Scotland, Councils or other parties. At present, Edinburgh is the only city with a prospect of reaching the Cycling Action Plan (CAPs) target of 10% of journeys being undertaken by bike by 2020. There needs to be a huge step change if this target is to be met by the rest of Scotland where only 2-3% of journeys are undertaken by bike.

The Scottish government has confirmed repeatedly its hugely ambitious 10% target, to be achieved by 2020. They have also just issued a 2017-2020 CAPs document to 'ensure active travel infrastructure is integral to all new transport infrastructure, including improvements to commuter routes' (Scottish Government submission to PE1653B on 3 August 2017).

What needs to be properly addressed is why there is such a huge disparity between the Scottish government's aims and the actual outcomes at present. A major reason has been inadequate funding to support the cycling infrastructure that would achieve the vision of 10% of journeys being completed by

bike, but it is also due to Transport Scotland and councils prioritising other areas within their transport strategy. As such, it is vital that Transport Scotland takes the lead on active travel and demonstrates by example.

The case for cycling is impossible to argue against. A recent article printed in the British Medical Journal concluded that commuting to work by bike was associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer and cut the overall chance of dying early by 40% (Celis-Morales et. al., 2017). The study concluded that initiatives to support active commuting, particularly by bicycle, such as cycle lanes, bike hire schemes and increased provision for cycles on public transport present major opportunities for the improvement of public health and will ease the burden of key chronic conditions. These co-benefits of active travel are reiterated in the Scottish Government's evidence review on the wider impacts of climate change and the transport sector (Pridmore et. Al., 2017).

What is clear is that cycling has the potential to support real transformation within societies on many different levels. The more people that cycle the less cars and associated pollutants, making the streets safer and easing congestion. The physical and mental health benefits of cycling have the potential to save the NHS billions of pounds every year. Not only are these benefits very positive socially, they are incredibly beneficial economically.

In terms of economic benefit, I have studied standard Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) along with other variants such as Multi-Criteria Analysis and Social Multi-Criteria Analysis in my Masters degree and was very interested to see how the economic appraisal for the Sheriffhall roundabout was done. I was astonished to see that the economic appraisal did not take into consideration the fact that Option C had high-quality segregated cycle provision - not only was the potential decrease in cars not considered but the economic benefits of cycling were not included. This is an issue that I raised at a Going Places: Sustainable Transport in Scotland Holyrood event. My concerns about the current appraisal methods were shared by John Lauder, the National Director of Sustrans and Professor Jillian Anable, Chair of the Research and Evidence Group, Review of the National Transport Strategy. Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) uses the journey saving time of vehicles as the key measure of economic success of a project, without taking a more comprehensive societal welfare perspective - this results in the options that favour a narrow view of motoring coming out best. Such an approach essentially presumes the answer, it isn't even necessary to use a model to come to that conclusion. Aside from lack of finance, this approach to transport appraisal will be a key limiting factor in helping to achieve the CAPS 10% target.

CAPS was established in 2010, Good Practice Guide for Roads was published in 2006 and updated in 2013. It has been almost a decade and even with the best intentions and guidance, little has changed with regards to active travel and cycling in Scotland. There has been a recent very welcome doubling of the active travel budget, which will help to implement strong Scottish policies for active travel but this is not enough. The way that transport projects are appraised is also vital and needs to be included in the Transport review. It is my understanding that there are moves afoot within Transport Scotland to broaden the criteria used in their economic appraisals by including the World Health Organisation's Health Economic Assessment Tool (HEAT) for cycling and walking. This would be used as part of a comprehensive CBA of transport interventions or infrastructure projects to model different levels of cycling or walking when new infrastructure is put in place and then value the mortality benefits. If this does become standard practice, it would be a very welcome step in the right direction. However, cycling's economic impact extends beyond that of health. Cycling infrastructure improvements result in increased trade for local businesses and annualised infrastructure costs are lower in less car dependent metropolises (Rajé and Saffrey, 2016). A thorough economic analysis would include all these impacts. Rajé and Saffrey state, 'There is a concern in the literature that the currently widely-used appraisal methods do not incorporate the full extent of benefits associated with cycling and this means that, as the mode competes for funding, it may always be seen as less viable than other options. Furthermore, there is little recognition of the disbenefits of non-cycling modes of transport in current appraisal methods.' There is a clear need to reevaluate how transport is being appraised if cycling's potential is to be revealed and cycling infrastructure projects financed.

Will this committee ensure that STAG and the process of appraising new transport projects is reviewed by an independent body? Whilst this is being done, and possibly for the indefinite future would it be possible for key stakeholders, such as Sustrans to be engaged at every stage in the process, making transport appraisal less opaque? If the Scottish government is serious about the 10% CAPS target and reducing both particulate and CO₂ emissions, then this needs to be included in the National Transport Strategy Review.

Finally, the Sheriffhall roundabout is central to the new transport developments to be created by the billion pound Edinburgh City-Region Deal. Shockingly, given government priorities, the Deal seems to have overlooked sustainable transport and active travel almost completely, which seems incredibly short sighted given all the new housing developments in Midlothian. Extending the active travel scope of the Sheriffhall roundabout to include separated cycle access on the roads leading from the roundabout to Edinburgh, Dalkeith and the new housing areas would help ensure proper travel choice, reduced congestion and regional connectivity. Would the Committee consider looking into this?

In conclusion, my specific suggestions for those areas where the Scottish Government has responsibility are...

- that integrated cycling provision is fully considered in all future Transport Scotland projects – whether road, rail, e-mobility, or whatever
- that all future Transport Scotland projects are consulted on when options are being devised, when options are being compared, and when final options are being refined
- that appraisal methods for the choice of options are fully transparent
- that STAG is modified to take fuller account of active travel and to reduce its dependence on small time savings to individual motorists
- that Sheriffhall project funding, design and implementation includes segregated cycling provision between the roundabout and Edinburgh, Dalkeith and the new housing areas. Leaving this to the local authorities, whose resourcing priorities lie more towards their centres of population, is a recipe for letting it lie on the table potentially for many years.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of this further or be involved in any way that may be beneficial.

References

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